"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values ch inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the al church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian al Civilization.*"

The Christian Rural Fellowship Bulletin

Published by The Christian Rural Fellowship, Room 1111, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

mber 71 April 1942

THE CHURCH AND THE LAND

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HOLBROOK LIBRARY PACIFIC SCHOOL OF RELIGION

The relation of man to land is the fundamental economic problem. Whether land shall be COMMON, or ALLOTTED to individuals; whether men shall be SLAVES or SERFS, that is, shall belong to other men, or shall belong to the land as part and parcel of its hereditaments; whether large holdings of land permanently by one family or corporation are economically permissible, and morally justifiable; whether the landlord shall be compelled to divide, and the landless encouraged to acquire land; whether any private land-owner has the right to pocket the increment which the community has earned for his land--these are the GREAT questions society has asked and is asking today. In very ancient times the question was as to personal right and share in the products of the hunting grounds and pastures which were common, and of the fields, which were more or less personally owned, because personally and individually tilled. In medieval times, the question was of bondage to another man, with the possibility of freedom at this master's whim or death, or of bondage to the soil as a sort of impersonal master with no hope of freedom. In our day when most of the land in civilized countries is owned by individuals, when the population of each country presses hard upon its food-producing capacity, when there is the world over a higher average INTELLIGENCE, a higher average POWER, and a higher average WANT, the question of man and land comes to the forefront in every nation. What shall be the policy of the State toward land? Shall the land-owner continue to possess his land? Shall this one man profit because many people live about him? Is his right in his land perpetual, inalienable, indefeasible? Shall one man add field to field, while thousands are tenants at will?

It is most interesting to note just here that in practically every country the State asserts the right of Eminent Domain. In actual fact, it is only as a tenant at will that any man holds land anywhere, for the State may step in and transfer that ownership, either to itself or to some other. We are all familiar with condemnation proceedings, by which governments acquire land for national uses or municipalities acquire land for town or city streets, or even railroad corporations acquire land for the laying of their tracks. It makes no difference how our titles may read, nor how secure we may imagine our-

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selves in the possession of land, it is still true that for good and sufficient reasons the land may be taken from us, and we ourselves thrust out. It should be added, further, that in many of the most highly civilized countries it has been found expedient to assist the landless man to acquire land and that sometimes the State has pursued this policy by wresting land from one man and settling it upon other men. In one word it may be said that most governments today recognize the importance of HOME OWNERSHIP (which means, of course, the ownership of a house and a certain parcel of ground larger or smaller) to the well-being of the people, and are ready to forward that home ownership by one method of another. Great Britain, for example, has passed laws by which it takes lands from large estates and sells them in smaller parcels to persons desiring homes, paying the former owners out of the public treasury and waiting through many years to be repaid by the new purchasers. Our own government, in the creation of forest reserves, in the making of irrigation and drainage districts, and in the passage of rural credit laws, is doing approximately the same thing.

But to the Christian and the Church, the most important questions are: What has the Bible to say about LAND OWNERSHIP? What is the will of God concerning it? It is the purpose of this paper to answer these questions, and to show what duties rest upon both the Christian and the Church in the light of these answers.

First, let us notice the close and intimate relation established by God at the creation between man and the earth. Gen. 1:26-28. God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion....over all the earth....And God created man in His own image....and God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." We thus have, as the primary and fundamental human or social relation, that between the sexes, which, as husband and wife, issues in the family and in the succession and multiplication of the race; and as the primary and fundamental material or economic relation, that between man and the earth, which issues in human ownership and control. Again, in Gen. 2:7-8, we are told that Jehovah God formed man out of the dust of the ground, planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there put the man whom He had formed, thus locating and relating the man very definitely to a certain piece of ground. Moreover, He gave him work to do that was essentially with the earth, for he had "to dress (i.e. till) the garden and to keep (i.e. guard) it." After sin entered, God declared: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee....in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Gen. 3:17-19.

When Adam was banished from Eden, God purposed that he should "till the ground from whence he was taken." These passages evidence clearly the close and intimate relation ordained by God between man and the ground: he is formed out of it, for his body draws all its elements from the mother earth. He lives upon a certain portion of it, to which he is usually closely tied; he works a still smaller portion of it, from which he gets his daily bread; at last he dies, and his body, slowly decaying, is re-incorporated into the earth. But God did not design that man should live upon the earth in these relations only, intimate as they are. When He called Abram it was "unto the land that I will show thee." When he covenants with him it is in terms first of all concerning that land. "Unto thy seed will I give THIS land," Gen. 12:7, and more implicitly in Gen. 13:14-15, 17, "And Jehovah said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and

tenant, preferably a former tenant on the estate, sometimes a purchaser from some other district....The small holder....pays at present 3 per cent interest on the purchase price and one-half per cent amortization,....payable in semi-annual installments. This rate amortizes the debt in about 62 years.

"Out of 90,000,000 pounds sold, the failures to pay the installments have been inconsiderable. In the county of Cork, the defaults have been nil....The small holdings movement has not stopped emigration, but it has made agriculture and rural life more hopeful."

This example is chosen out of very many that could be given to show that the governments of the world are now coming to do what Moses did--settle the people upon the land "according to their families."

HOME OWNERSHIP, therefore, is based upon the initial command of God to the whole race, with respect to the whole earth, and upon the disposition by families upon that portion of it which God allotted peculiarly to one nation. "The earth hath He given to the children of men," and as between nation and nation, He hath appointed the bounds of their habitations. What was best for His own delightsome land and His own chosen people is probably best for all nations, and to that method of landholding by families in small lots all experience and reason point. Towards it all civilizations gradually make their way.

Shall the Church be silent and inactive in respect to this greatest of all modern economic movements? Will the Church still maintain an unconcern, as if it alone of human institutions had no eye to see, no ear to hear, no hand to help those great mass movements of the race by which millions are lifted through methods shaped by the word of God to a larger, happier, more abundant life?

I would suggest that the Church and the Christian adopt a policy not merely of non-interference, but of active participation in these movements to advance home ownership.

The Church may show that as God made our first parents, man and woman, and gave them to each other, as husband and wife, thus founding the family, so He gave them a certain limited place, the Garden of Eden, with instruction to till it and protect it, thus founding the home, and illustrating His will as to home ownership and home care. The one ought not to exist without the other. The Church may raise the question if the family can be properly maintained apart from its own home.

The Church may show that the land is God's; that it bears thorns and thistles because of sin; that it awaits its full redemption, as Christians also do. Thus the subjugation of the earth will be invested with a sort of romance, a mysticism, if you please, and men will feel themselves more fully co-workers with Him who is invisible.

With the recognition that all nations are of one blood, that there is a true Israel, wider in extent than the old Israel; that it is every man's duty to love his neighbor as himself, the Church may show that the principles underlying the theocratic government of the Jewish Commonwealth underlie also God's providence for the world. So that what was originally given for one nation only becomes an intimation and guide for all nations.

The Church may show that what was once done as a matter of law is now

We have seen how God at the first instituted a very close relation between man and the land, that He encouraged Abraham, His friend, with the gift of the Promised Land, that He later settled the chosen people upon this land "according to their families." As this nation illustrates theocratic government as no other has, may we not fairly conclude that, judging from this example, it is the will of God that every family should own its home?

This conclusion becomes the more assured when we turn to the prophets. Their language seems too general to be confined to the Israelites alone. If it is said that the settlement in Canaan afforded no indication of God's will for us in this modern day, surely that cannot be said of these utterances. Is. 5:8: "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in midst of the land." Micah 2:1-2: "Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds. When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them away, and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage." For here again, God indicates that it is His will that every family should be secure in the possession of its home. When the Scriptures picture the happy condition of the latter days, when Jehovah's house is established, and peoples flow unto it, when many nations have learned of His ways and walk in His paths; when their swords are beaten into plow-shares, then "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid." Mic. 4:4. What is this but saying that in that good day, every man shall be secure in the enjoyment of his own home? As for argument from the New Testament, it suffices to show that under the second great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," it is only necessary to learn what we ourselves want, what we esteem as right and good for ourselves, in order to know what is right and good for our fellowmen. Do we want homes of our own? To this question, the hearts of men instinctively answer, "Yes, we do." It is our duty as Christians to translate into actual fact the will of God as written in His Word, and as inscribed upon the human heart. What can the Christian man do, what can the Church do toward the realization among men of this instinctive desire for one's own home, impressed by God upon the heart?

To subdue the earth is a God-given obligation imposed upon all men, and the means and methods of its accomplishment are to be worked out by men in the light of both Scripture and human reason.

When we find Almighty God settling His chosen people in their Promised Land, "according to their families," we may be sure, it seems to me, that this is an indication of His will for all people and of those plans which in human experience and reason will finally be found to be best.

It seems wise to insert here the testimony of a sub-committee of the Congressional Committee that investigated Agricultural Credit in Europe.[1]

"....These estates (in Ireland) may be purchased at a voluntary sale from the owners, or (within the area of the Congested District Board) the sale may be made on compulsion.....Since its inception (in Ireland) the Estates Commission has purchased and resold about 8,000,000 acres, valued at 90,000,000 pounds....Estates sold under compulsion, the Government must pay for in cash....Once purchased, the estate is divided into tracts of 25 to 40 acres; line walls are built, if necessary a house is constructed at a cost of about 200 pounds; and the place is sold to a

1. Agricultural Co-operation in Europe, pp. 865-867, Government Printing Office, Washington

westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever....Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it."

Could language convey more plainly or perfectly the idea that God purposed that this man and his descendants should sustain to this particular locality that peculiar relation which we call OWNERSHIP? The covenant had certain spiritual features and blessings to be sure, but along with these as it were, giving them substance and body, was the PROMISED LAND. When God would send Moses to deliver the Israelites out of their bondage in Egypt, He did it in these terms, "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters.....And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey." Ex. 3:7-8. This delightful land was made still more alluring in Moses' address, Deut. 11:10-11, "For the land whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst they seed and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs, but the land whither ye go to possess it is a land of hills and valleys and drinketh water of the rain of heaven; a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." In this way and by these promises, did God endeavor to create in the minds of the chosen people an intense longing and love for that land.

In the settlement of the people in the land, this formula occurs, repeated with each one of the eleven tribes, "according to their families," by which we understand that each family received as its peculiar possession a certain portion of the whole allotment for its tribe. This view is borne out by the fact that mention is made of several family portions, as for Caleb, Joshua, the daughters of Zelophehad, and for the sons of Manasseh. Josh. 17:2-6.

This family inheritance was held upon terms laid down in Lev. 25, and chief among the provisions there given are these: (1) That in the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, "ye shall return every man unto his possession, and unto his family." (2) That in all purchases of land, the opportunity for redemption was to be given. The fields of the country, the houses in unwalled villages, might be redeemed at any time, and if not redeemed, they returned in the Jubilee year to the family that had at first received them from Joshua. By these statutes two remarkable practical results were secured: that no family could be longer than forty-nine years without land, a home or a field, or both, and that no family could add permanently to its own ancestral holding.

It is thus plain that the Mosaic law was designed to avoid, on the one hand, that dire poverty which always results from successive generations without the means of subsistence through land-holding, and, on the other, that luxury and extravagance which always accompany the possession of great landed estates through successive generations. By these laws, the Israelites would inevitably become a nation of small landed proprietors, each family receiving a share in the family lands. If the family grew larger, the share of each was smaller, thus making for a more intensive cultivation capable of sustaining the increasing population.

How long the Israelites held to this divine arrangement is seen from the narrative of Naboth, the Jezreelite, who refused to sell King Ahab his vineyard, not because Ahab did not offer him the worth of it, but upon the express ground that it was "the inheritance of my fathers."

become a matter of love, which is the higher law. Once slavery was well-nigh universal; it was mitigated by Mosaic law. Now it is almost abandoned throughout the earth. Once a father had despotic power over his daughter's marriage; this was abridged by Mosaic law, and now in most countries women have been cheerfully given a larger liberty. Just so with land-holding, a matter of law for each family among the Jews, it becomes a matter now of love.

The Church ought, therefore, to encourage men in their efforts to get land. It ought to speak to the land-owner with sufficient authority to impel him to sell a part of his land, and to the tenant with sufficient encouragement to make him buy. It ought to provide facilities for bringing men without land back to the soil. As with the individual Christian, so with the Church, it must be not only a hearer and preacher of the Word, but a doer also.

And the Church, therefore, must not permit the state to pre-empt the whole field of rural credits. Then, indeed, would the children of this world be wiser in their generation than the children of light. The Church ought to use its own money to advance home ownership. We have now--all the large churches have--some hundreds of thousands, some millions of dollars, invested an endowments, in bonds and mortgages of city real estate. Why could not this same money be loaned to young men of good moral character to purchase homes for themselves in the country? Much of this money is already loaned, as it must necessarily be, with an element of moral risk involved. That element will probably not be materially increased if more loans should be made for the purchase of homes in the country to men of an established good reputation. The same legal acumen that now passes upon the validity of a bond or title or mortgage could pass upon the title and mortgage of land in the country. The probability is that in the country over, the rise in the price of farm land at least keeps pace with the price of city lots, so that the element of relative security would remain the same. Of course, the terms of the mortgage would be different, for there would be no expectation of collecting or paying the principal except through amortization. The rate of interest would be always commensurate with the rates of money employed in business.

But might not the Church find it advantageous and profitable in the long run to lower the average rate from seven to six, or from six to three per cent, and suffer a loss here and there in income for a while, if she builds for herself for generations to come a community of home-owning, home-loving, home-keeping people?

Will not the people love more loyally and support more freely that Church, if in addition to giving a knowledge of the home that shall be, it aid in the possession of the home that now is?

I am not advocating that all the funds of the Church should be loaned upon farm land or to further the purchase of homes in the country. I do think that some of the funds should be so placed; that the Church should mix philanthropy with its business. I believe that the future of the Church, as well as of the State, depends in no small degree upon the farmer who lives contentedly upon his own acres and tills them. The powers for evil of landlordism and tenantry are so terrible that the history of the world may almost be written in terms of their struggles. The question will never be solved, cannot indeed be solved, without the aid of the Church, which must interpret the will of God to the people, must put home ownership upon a parity with the family, and must strive by all the means in its power towards that goal.

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